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**[Pence: Afghan policy can succeed](#)**

**By Dave Stafford, Herald Bulletin Staff Writer**

ANDERSON- - Rep. Mike Pence on Wednesday acknowledged rare praise for President Barack Obama after a holiday trip to Afghanistan, but he also blasted Democrats in Congress who he said were dealing in the dark to reach a compromise on health care legislation.

Pence, R-6th District, visited with members of The Herald Bulletin's editorial board and discussed his impressions after meeting with troops, military officials and Afghan leaders during a recent two-day trip to Kabul and Kandahar, Afghanistan.

"I really do believe the president has articulated a policy that can succeed if we give it the time to succeed," Pence said of a surge that will draw an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan this year, primarily to areas where the Taliban are attempting to reassert control along the Pakistan border.

"The focus is right, the numbers are right," Pence said.

Pence said he is concerned by Obama's suggestion that troops could be withdrawn from the country by July 2011. He said militants are using the timeline as a recruiting tool.

"I continue to believe the deadline for beginning to withdraw is ill-advised," he said.

Pence said during his visit that Afghan President Hamid Karzai was told that upcoming parliamentary elections in his country must run smoother than his disputed presidential election or he will risk losing support at home and abroad.

He said Obama and lawmakers have a tough mission in keeping Americans focused on the importance of the Afghan mission, but he credited Obama for reinforcing the mission in announcing the surge in forces.

"This really is the central front in the war on terror," Pence said. "It's clear this spring is going to be tough. ... The Taliban want Afghanistan back."

He said the strategy is "getting in front of the spring offensive of the Taliban," so troops can "knock them down before they get a toe-hold."

The congressman also praised servicemen and -women after his eighth trip to either Iraq or Afghanistan.

Upon his return to Washington, Pence will join lawmakers attempting to reconcile House- and Senate-approved health care bills. An outspoken critic of the reform bills, he did not relent. He called the proposal a huge tax increase.

"The way to raise taxes during the worst recession in 26 years is don't," said Pence, the No. 3 House Republican.